Amendment Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and under Water

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 7th MEETING

Held at United Nations Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 11 January 1991, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. ALATAS (Indonesia)

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General debate (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Ms. RIVERA (Costa Rica) said that the Amendment Conference was a historic event. Costa Rica believed that, in order to halt the nuclear-arms race and subsequently eliminate such weapons, it was necessary to halt nuclear tests, including underground ones.

2. Costa Rica urged the original parties to the partial test-ban Treaty to undertake joint efforts in order to carry out the tasks facing the Conference. Otherwise, future generations would be confronted by the threat of a nuclear catastrophe and the destruction of the entire planet.

3. A comprehensive test-ban treaty was an urgent necessity, and Costa Rica wished to state that it would vote in favour of amending the Moscow Treaty.

4. Mr. KAKOURIS (Cyprus) said that the Conference was being held against the backdrop of major changes on the international political scene, the end of the cold war, which had been the root cause of the spiraling arms race. Nevertheless, the prospects for the establishment of a new world order were being overshadowed by regional conflicts, the very real threat of war in the Gulf and continued nuclear-weapon testing.

5. The commitment undertaken by the original States parties to the Moscow Treaty to seek to achieve the discontinuance of all test explosions of nuclear weapons for all time and continue negotiations to that end was as relevant today as in 1963. The urgent need for a comprehensive nuclear-test ban had been repeatedly emphasized in various United Nations resolutions. Nevertheless, despite the general recognition of the destructive nature of nuclear weapons and the fact that a nuclear war could not be won, nuclear testing continued.

6. The emerging international political structure was increasingly being based on dialogue and co-operation, not confrontation and mistrust. That, together with the signing of a number of disarmament and arms-reduction agreements, was creating conditions for a transition towards complete nuclear disarmament by transforming the partial test-ban Treaty into a comprehensive test-ban treaty. Cyprus welcomed all initiatives and agreements designed to make the world safer and expressed particular satisfaction at the recent agreement between Argentina and Brazil pledging not to pursue the development of nuclear weapons. All those agreements, however, would remain half-measures, if testing continued since that would lead to the further improvement of nuclear weapons and a new spiral in the arms race and also have a negative impact on the prevention of horizontal nuclear proliferation.

7. There was a direct link between a comprehensive nuclear-test ban and the non-proliferation régime. One of the dangers of continued testing by the nuclear Powers was that it might induce countries on the threshold of acquiring nuclear weapons to join the nuclear club and their example might be followed by other

(Mr. Kakouris, Cyprus)

States. Current technological and scientific methods made it possible to solve the problem of verification, which in the past had been the stumbling block to attaining a comprehensive test ban. His delegation hoped that the signing of the verification protocols to the 1974 and the 1976 Treaties between the United States and the Soviet Union would help solve that problem. The significant efforts of the Group of Scientific Experts, established by the Conference on Disarmament and also the findings set forth in the study on the role of the United Nations in the field of verification (document A/45/372) should be given greater attention.

3. Public awareness of the inherent dangers of a nuclear disaster, for example, including those linked to the Chernobyl tragedy, had been heightened in recent years. The adverse effects of tests on health and plant and animal life had been clearly identified in the comprehensive study on nuclear weapons (document A/45/373). The active contribution by the various non-governmental organizations that promoted the early conclusion of a comprehensive test-ban treaty helped focus public opinion on that problem.

9. The task of concluding such a treaty was not an easy one. Although divergent views continued to exist, his delegation felt that under current circumstances words could be transformed into deeds with the necessary political will. In 1984, the Secretary-General had pointed out that a comprehensive test-ban treaty was the litmus test of the real willingness of States to pursue nuclear disarmament. The Amendment Conference was also such a litmus test and the opportunity that it provided should not be missed.

10. Mr. LUNA (Peru) said that six non-aligned non-nuclear countries, including Peru, had assumed the historic responsibility for resuming international negotiations on a comprehensive nuclear-test ban and had proposed an amendment to the Moscow Treaty. The new international situation demonstrated that there was no longer any need to conduct nuclear tests. In that regard, it should be stressed that the resources allocated for the development of nuclear weapons could be utilized in order to expand the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Since 1963, the nuclear threat had only increased and nuclear tests were very closely linked to the development of nuclear capability. Accordingly, Peru advocated the complete cessation of such tests.

11. Although his country recognized and respected the obligations under the Moscow Treaty, it considered that all States had an equal right to seek to change or amend the Treaty, particularly in view of the fact that it was a question involving the entire international community. Peru was prepared to consider constructively all proposals that helped to achieve the goals of the Conference. Consideration should be given to questions relating to a draft protocol on verification, although the discussion of the amendment should not be linked to success in other areas. It should be kept in mind that the participants at the Conference would be discussing not merely a legal document, but the prospects for a new international order.

12. Mr. OUDOVENKO (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and under Water, signed at Moscow in 1963, had been the first step towards halting the refinement of nuclear weapons, one of the corner-stones of the nuclear-arms race. Its significance could not be overestimated and the Treaty would be greatly strengthened if all States, especially the nuclear-weapon States, adhered to it.

13. Settling the issue of the complete cessation of nuclear testing had become a priority for mankind and demanded immediate action. His Government attached the utmost importance to that issue. The declaration on the State sovereignty of the Ukraine, adopted by the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR on 16 July 1990, proclaimed the country's intention of becoming a permanently neutral State in future, one which did not take part in military blocs and adhered to three nuclear-free principles - not to take, not to produce and not to acquire nuclear weapons. The Ukraine was resolutely in favour of banning nuclear tests at the earliest date. It was not convinced by the arguments of those States that claimed that a comprehensive test ban was a "long-term goal". Such an approach was reflected in the statement made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Ukraine in the First Committee at the forty-fifth session of the General Assembly.

14. The main reason for the failure to settle the issue of a comprehensive nuclear-test ban was lack of political will on the part of some nuclear States to take that step. Any problems in that connection could be solved through joint efforts and to everyone's satisfaction. The proposal under discussion at the present Conference - to extend the 1963 Moscow Treaty to cover underground testing - would mean a complete ban on nuclear-weapon tests. It was important that discussion of the issue in that forum should be geared from the outset towards a joint search for the best solution and the elaboration of universally acceptable practical measures. The Ukrainian SSR believed that use must be made of all possible channels that would enable progress to be made towards early settlement of the issue of a comprehensive nuclear-test ban. To that end, both bilateral and multilateral negotiating channels must be put into operation and must complement each other organically. A step-by-step approach was also possible, provided that it was aimed at the early achievement of a comprehensive ban.

15. His delegation placed great hopes in the Ad Hoc Committee on a nuclear-test ban established within the framework of the Conference on Disarmament. One very useful measure would be a moratorium on testing to which all the nuclear Powers would adhere on a reciprocal basis. The proposal on the immediate cessation of nuclear testing and the holding of a parliamentary referendum in that connection deserved attention. His delegation was prepared to support any verification measures which would create reliable guarantees of compliance with a comprehensive test-ban treaty. Such measures must include the methods enumerated in the draft basic provisions of a treaty on the complete and general prohibition of nuclear-weapon-tests: a seismic verification system, verification of airborne radioactivity and on-site inspections. In addition, use could be made of the corresponding elements of the verification mechanisms for the 1974 and 1976 Treaties recently worked out at the Soviet-American talks.

16. Mr. TAEB (Afghanistan) noted that the convening of the Amendment Conference reflected the desire of the majority of States parties to the partial test-ban Treaty to achieve the goal proclaimed in its preamble, namely "the discontinuance of all test explosions of nuclear weapons for all time" in all environments and by all States. The many resolutions adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations and the activities of the Conference on Disarmament and the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear-Test Ban established thereunder in 1990 were all designed to contribute to the attainment of that goal.

17. The present favourable international climate offered an historic opportunity to settle that fundamental issue in the field of the nuclear-arms race, and the signing of the INF Treaty, the Treaty on the Reduction of Conventional Armed Forces in Europe and the verification protocols to the 1974 and 1976 threshold test-ban Treaties paved the way for further movement towards general and complete disarmament. All that was needed was the necessary political will.

18. There were no longer any technological obstacles to a comprehensive test ban: a verification mechanism could be set up that included seismic monitoring, the measurement of atmospheric radioactivity and on-site inspections.

19. A comprehensive ban on nuclear tests would also strengthen the non-proliferation régime and its universality. Some non-nuclear States refused to adhere to the non-proliferation Treaty, alleging that it was discriminatory. While that position was totally unacceptable, it should be noted that the nuclear States were not fulfilling their commitment to work seriously for a comprehensive test ban.

20. His country supported the amendment proposed by the six countries and believed that the international community should continue its efforts to secure the conclusion of a comprehensive test-ban treaty.

21. Mr. FRANCESE (Italy) said that in the course of the negotiations that had led to the conclusion of the partial test-ban Treaty, it had been perceived that the opportunity of concluding a comprehensive test ban already existed. Attempts made at the time to achieve that goal had failed for two basic reasons: limited verification possibilities and the distrust prevailing in East-West relations.

22. By now, verification technologies had greatly progressed, making the detection of underground nuclear explosions far more reliable than in the 1950s or 1960s. Moreover, the political environment had largely changed. As a result, on-site inspections now appeared acceptable and the principle of co-operation in the field of verification had replaced the earlier distrust and confrontation. A comprehensive test ban was therefore a more realistic goal now than at any time in the past 30 years. The re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee at Geneva in 1990 was a politically significant step in that direction.

23. Despite its limited achievements, the Conference on Disarmament remained the appropriate forum for in-depth consideration of the issue of a comprehensive test ban in all its aspects. The experience acquired in recent years and the unprecedented progress achieved in arms control, especially within the framework of

(Mr. Francese, Italy)

East-West relations, had proved that a step-by-step approach was essential in order to achieve concrete and lasting results.

24. With the conclusion of the INF Treaty, the seeds had been sown for an irreversible reduction, at least in numbers, in the two largest nuclear arsenals; a START agreement was expected to further limit the size of those arsenals. With the ratification of the threshold test-ban Treaties, the United States and the Soviet Union had begun a process of joint control and further limitation of nuclear tests.

25. Although the process of reducing nuclear weapons had been initiated by the visible efforts of the two depositories of the largest arsenals on earth, it could not continue without the determined support of the whole international community. A comprehensive test ban could be achieved only through comparable and proportionate efforts by all parties concerned.

26. His Government believed that the Conference would best serve its objective if it reached a better understanding of the motives for States parties' common adherence to the partial test-ban Treaty and of the reasons why they all subscribed to the principle that a comprehensive test ban was necessary.

27. Mr. EL-FATTAL (Syrian Arab Republic) said that a comprehensive test ban had been called for by all countries and peoples seeking to promote peace and stability and that the success of the current Conference would create favourable conditions for preparing for and holding the Fifth Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 1995.

28. The questions of a comprehensive test ban and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons were indivisibly linked. The refusal to conclude a comprehensive test-ban treaty was at variance with obligations under the non-proliferation Treaty and other international agreements and conventions. The Amendment Conference, therefore, was part of the overall effort to achieve general and complete disarmament, particularly with regard to nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction.

29. As a non-aligned country, Syria fully complied with the provisions of the partial test-ban Treaty. Nevertheless, the shortcoming of the Treaty was that the nuclear Powers had not been able to reach agreement on halting underground tests in spite of all the efforts of the non-aligned countries in that regard. Failure to adopt the amendment to the Treaty would weaken the non-proliferation régime and encourage certain States not to carry out its provisions.

30. At their meeting at the highest level in Belgrade in 1989, the non-aligned countries had called upon the three Depositary States of the Treaty to demonstrate greater flexibility in order to guarantee the continued effectiveness of the non-proliferation régime. Most delegations at the current Conference had pointed out that a speedy halt to testing would be an important step towards eliminating the threat of the qualitative improvement and development of new weapon systems and

(Mr. El-Fattal, Syrian Arab Republic)

would promote the non-proliferation of such weapon systems. The amendment proposed by the six countries should be considered and adopted because it was in keeping with the interests of all participants at the Conference. Furthermore, it was necessary to step up the work of the Ad Hoc Committee in the Conference on Disarmament in order to follow up the implementation of General Assembly resolution 43/50.

31. A comprehensive ban on nuclear weapons and the non-proliferation régime constituted the basis for establishing a new system of international security. At the current Conference, it was necessary to strengthen the non-proliferation régime, which was a further measure for increasing the effectiveness of a comprehensive test ban.

32. Since the partial test-ban Treaty expired in four years, negotiations should be conducted in order to reach agreement on banning tests in all environments and for all time in order to prevent the horizontal and vertical proliferation of nuclear weapons.

33. Syria had proposed the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East at the Paris Conference on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. In 1990 in Algeria, the Mediterranean countries had adopted the Egyptian initiative and the proposal by Syria concerning the transformation of the Mediterranean region into a nuclear-weapon-free zone under effective international control. It was paradoxical that Israel, which had signed the partial test-ban Treaty in 1963, had not yet signed and ratified the non-proliferation Treaty, apparently in order to plan and carry out nuclear-weapon tests. That created a threat to peace and security in the region.

34. The world community was increasingly aware of the danger which nuclear testing posed to the environment and health. Nevertheless, since 1963, 1,300 nuclear-weapon tests had been conducted, 85 per cent of which by the Depositary States. In the Pacific Ocean basin alone, 17 nuclear explosions had been carried out, resulting in contamination of the Ocean, destruction of marine resources, and also damage to the health of the population in the region.

35. Syria was prepared to contribute to the work of the bodies to be set up at the Conference and had high regard for the work of non-governmental organizations in providing valuable information and informing the general public.

36. Mr. KOSTOV (Bulgaria) said that his delegation was participating in the Conference in the belief that the nuclear threat remained one of the foremost global challenges facing mankind. Bulgaria welcomed the beginning of real nuclear disarmament initiated by the Soviet Union and the United States. The elimination of an entire class of nuclear weapons, the signing of the agreement on the reduction of conventional forces in Europe and the anticipated conclusion of a treaty on strategic offensive weapons had demonstrated what could be achieved by means of political vision and statesmanship.

(Mr. Kostov, Bulgaria)

37. Bulgaria had acceded to the partial test-ban Treaty on the day on which it had been opened for signature. The Treaty had played and was continuing to play a substantial role in limiting nuclear-weapon tests, especially from the ecological point of view. At the same time, his country remained firmly committed to the goal of a comprehensive test ban in full conformity with the provisions and obligations set forth in the partial test-ban Treaty and the non-proliferation Treaty.

38. For almost three decades, the question of a comprehensive test ban had occupied an important place on the international disarmament agenda. It was clear, however, that the failure to conclude a comprehensive test-ban treaty would not be due to a lack of awareness of the importance and urgency of that problem. The Treaty had always been regarded as an effective means of curbing the arms race and the qualitative development and proliferation of nuclear weapons.

39. A comprehensive test-ban treaty could be achieved in one step or in several steps. Bulgaria felt that the second approach was more realistic. His delegation welcomed the re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban. Furthermore, that problem had a direct bearing on the basic security interests of many States and alliances and that fact should also be taken into account.

40. Bulgaria hoped that the conclusion in June 1990 of the protocols to the threshold test-ban Treaty and the peaceful nuclear explosions Treaty would lead to further progress towards the achievement of a comprehensive test ban.

41. The question of verification was undoubtedly very important. It was now quite clear that the technical questions relating to the monitoring of compliance with a comprehensive test-ban treaty had been largely resolved.

42. Bulgaria approached the issue of a comprehensive test ban in the broader context of nuclear weapons and nuclear non-proliferation. It supported the constant efforts to achieve the goals in that important area and was in favour of the earliest possible conclusion of a comprehensive test-ban treaty on the basis of a stage-by-stage approach. His delegation shared the view expressed by many delegations that the nuclear-weapon States should consider reducing the number and yield of their test explosions.

43. Bulgaria regarded the Conference as a starting-point for realizing a noble goal and hoped that it would generate specific ideas and the determination to move forward at the bilateral and the multilateral levels.

44. Mrs. DIALLO (Senegal) said that despite the significant efforts of the international community since the conclusion of the 1963 Moscow Treaty to achieve a comprehensive nuclear-test ban, there had still been no success in ending underground tests. Understanding the complexity of the issue, and taking into consideration the commitment of a number of States to the doctrine of nuclear deterrence and the problems of verification, her delegation none the less was convinced that political will and constructive dialogue would enable the ultimate goal to be achieved. Another important factor facilitating progress towards a

(Mrs. Diallo, Senegal)

comprehensive nuclear-test ban was the positive change in the international situation, the rapprochement between East and West and the progress in Soviet-American negotiations on disarmament and arms control. At the same time the crisis in the Gulf recalled to mind the serious dangers that still threatened peace and security and underscored the need for further efforts to achieve a comprehensive test ban. In that connection, her delegation noted with satisfaction the commitment of the Soviet Union to facilitating a comprehensive ban.

45. Senegal, which like other African countries was facing many serious problems, felt a special concern over the serious threat of nuclear weapons and the fatal consequences of nuclear testing. It had always favoured the reallocation of resources expended on military requirements to the fight against hunger, disease, poverty and indebtedness. Supporting all initiatives and efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive nuclear-test ban, Senegal consistently endorsed the establishment of nuclear-free zones and particularly the declaration of the African continent as such a zone.

46. Amendment of the 1963 Treaty and the establishment of effective verification machinery would facilitate the achievement of those goals and the strengthening of a non-proliferation system. In recognition of the fact that the Conference would not have enough time to achieve that goal, it would be useful to envisage the establishment of a working group to continue consideration of the issue. In conclusion, she urged the States parties to the Treaty to do their utmost to ensure that the Conference would pave the way for a compromise, with due regard for the specific interests of the respective States and the need to strengthen peace and international security.

47. Mr. GHAREKHAN (India) said that, when the partial test-ban Treaty had been signed in 1963, the international community had hoped that it would be followed by other agreements, including a comprehensive test-ban treaty. Unfortunately those hopes had failed to materialize. Even though the signing of the Treaty had resulted in a significant reduction in the radioactive contamination of the atmosphere, oceans and land, an end to the qualitative and quantitative nuclear-arms race had not been achieved. It had been estimated that in the period from the signature of the Treaty until 1989 more than 1,270 tests had been conducted and that over the past five years the nuclear-weapon States had conducted 172 nuclear tests.

48. The Conference was the appropriate forum for considering the problem of a comprehensive nuclear-test ban. All aspects of a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty had already been studied in detail and all that remained for the Conference to do was to stimulate sufficient political will on the part of the States parties for the amendment to be adopted. The key to success was held by the nuclear-weapon States. Negotiations were under way between the United States and the Soviet Union on a number of nuclear arms control agreements, but none of them prohibited the upgrading of existing weapons systems.

(Mr. Gharekhan, India)

49. In the earlier consideration of a comprehensive test-ban treaty, peaceful nuclear explosions had always been assigned a separate role. The original intention had been to maintain a dividing-line between nuclear explosions for military purposes, which were to be prohibited entirely, and nuclear explosions for peaceful purposes, to be allowed under certain conditions. At the same time doubts had been raised in recent years about the utility of peaceful nuclear explosions.

50. His delegation felt that a comprehensive test ban played a positive role and that an opportune moment had arrived to achieve agreement on the drafting of a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty.

51. Mr. NOTERDAEME (Belgium) said that Belgium supported a comprehensive nuclear-test ban. That had been demonstrated with the utmost clarity in the General Assembly and in other international forums. Belgium was a State party to the partial test-ban Treaty and to the non-proliferation Treaty. It had refrained from possessing any nuclear explosive devices. That, however, did not mean that it was not interested in the discontinuance of nuclear tests. On the contrary, the Belgian Government regarded the conclusion of a treaty on the discontinuance of nuclear tests as one of the goals of arms limitation. The tasks of the Government of Belgium in the area of disarmament, which had been defined in 1988, were active support for the reduction of arsenals of strategic nuclear weapons to achieve a balance at the lowest possible level and the conclusion of a treaty on the discontinuance of nuclear tests.

52. Those goals, together with the reduction of short-range nuclear weapons, fell within the framework of a general policy of peace and security, which also provided for co-operation within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and defining security in Western Europe.

53. Belgium felt that a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty, verification of which would be ensured only with the help of seismic means of verification, did not provide guarantees comparable to those in the non-proliferation Treaty. That treaty could not be considered an alternative to the non-proliferation Treaty. An effective international system for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons was still an integral component of international security.

54. A comprehensive test-ban treaty did not solve the problem of the reduction of nuclear arsenals. His Government fully supported negotiations on strategic offensive arms and favoured the reduction of nuclear-weapon stockpiles in Europe.

55. As for the problem of verification, the most appropriate forum for considering it was the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, especially if renewal of the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban was taken into consideration.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.